

Testimony – Martha Trout, MPA, BSN, OCN
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American Cancer Society, Great Lakes Division
Senate Committee on Insurance
SB 540-541
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2:30 pm
100 Farnum Building, Lansing

Good afternoon Senators. Thank you for the opportunity to testify. My name is Martha Trout, Director of Health Initiatives for the American Cancer Society, Great Lakes Division and an oncology nurse.

Oral chemotherapies, which work by targeting and attacking only cancer cells, are often the best – and many times the only – treatments available for cancer patients. Many of the emerging and most effective cancer therapies are available only in pill form. Imagine not being able to take the treatment needed to save your life because you cannot afford it.

Unfortunately, this is the case for far too many cancer patients. The costs for oral chemotherapies are often astronomical, making them difficult for many patients to afford. Your support of SB 540-541 can change that! These bills ensure that cancer patients have equal access to all chemotherapies, regardless of how the medication is delivered. The bills would eliminate disparities in health insurance coverage between oral and intravenous chemotherapy.

Up until now, the majority of frontline cancer chemotherapy treatments have been administered to patients primarily through an IV while in the physicians' office. The emerging oral chemotherapy drugs are the latest breakthrough advances in cancer chemotherapy. To continue to classify oral chemotherapies as a prescription drug benefit and not a life-saving medical treatment is out-dated and unfair. Patients should not have to face extra, often financially crippling, out-of-pocket costs because they receive their treatment as a pill instead of intravenously. Patients should not have to decide between their health or a paycheck.

Oral cancer chemotherapy drugs represent an exciting new development in frontline cancer therapy and these drugs are showing remarkable promise at targeting the tumor with limited side effects. As such, they are a critical treatment option for many cancer patients. Unlike intravenous chemotherapy which requires an appointment and time away from work and home to receive the treatment, oral chemo does not and allows for patients to have less disruption in their daily life-not taking time off work and using up vacation and sick time. This is especially important for patients that may have to travel far to receive their treatment.

As the nation's largest voluntary health organization dedicated to improving cancer care, the American Cancer Society has a significant interest in assuring that all cancer patients have access to the broad range of therapies needed to combat their disease.

Scientific advances have now provided us with new, even more effective treatments for some cancers. However these new treatments are only available in oral form and American Cancer Society strongly believes that these oral anti-cancer drugs should be covered in a similar manner to drugs that can be offered in an intravenous form.

Access to oral chemotherapy drugs has become more important to cancer treatment as science evolves. As oral chemotherapy drugs become more prevalent and are prescribed more often, the American Cancer Society believes there should be parity in the coverage of these so that cancer patients may be equally able to access or afford them as they can with traditional intravenous chemotherapy.

Improvements in cancer treatment should not be hampered by out-dated health insurance practices and coverage must keep pace with modern medical treatments. I urge your support of SB 540-541 to ensure cancer patients in Michigan have equal access to the best care needed to fight their disease.

I hope that I can count on your support of SB 540-541. Thank you for your time and consideration.